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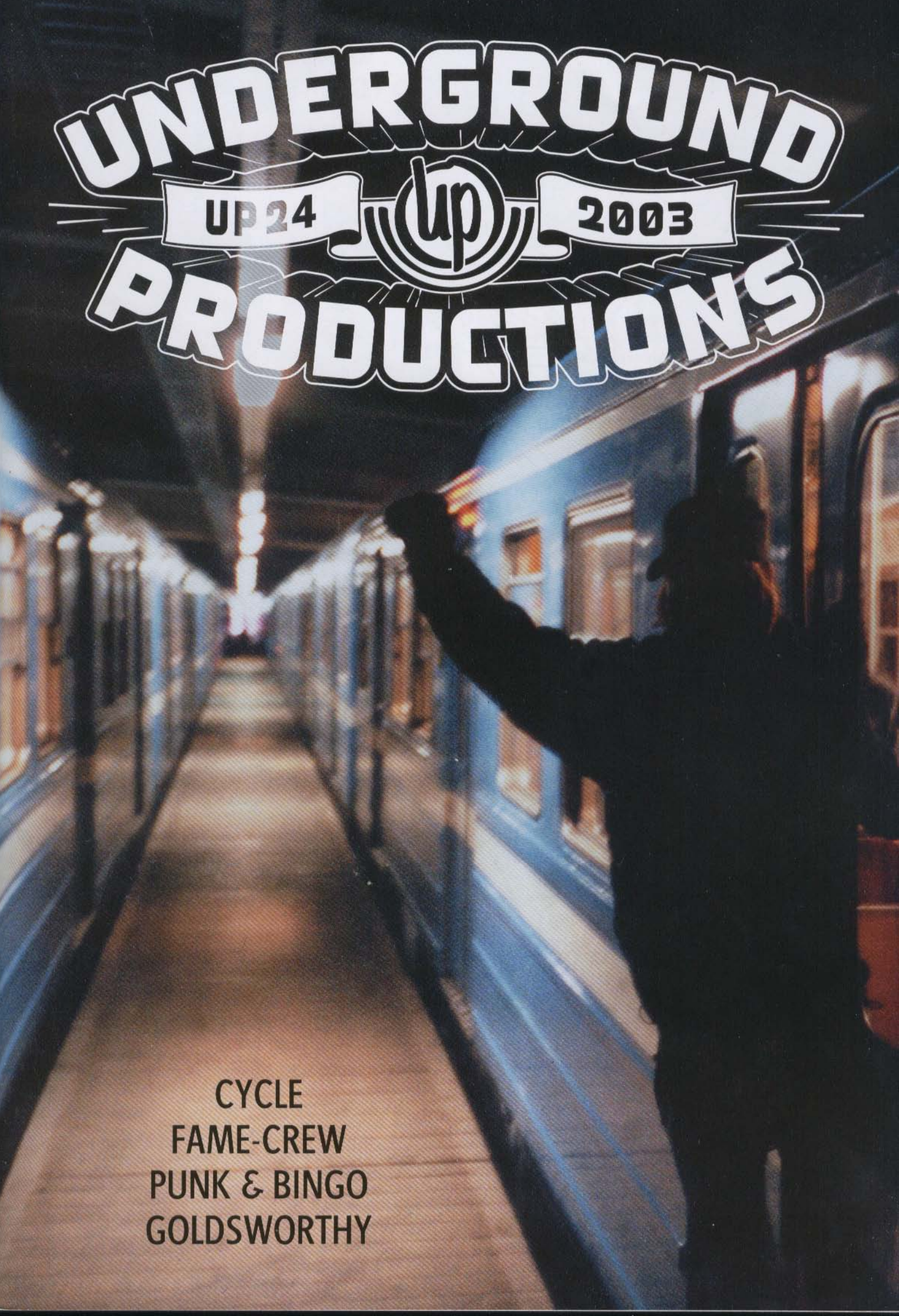
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"Graffiti writers are mean and cruel and have no respect for themselves or others"

As an enthusiast of graffiti, or a writer, you get to hear quite a few tired comments about graffiti.

"I really like nice, colorful paintings that liven up gray concrete walls, but that scribbling is only destructive." Heard that one before?

Or this: "Graffiti writers are mean and cruel and have no respect for themselves or others."

These are the two most common stereotypes about graffiti, but there are others. Those who think it is wonderful that young people work with art but can still be rebellious. Those who would use the street attitude of graffiti for their own purposes: media, companies, designers. Some politically active people who think that graffiti should be overtly political, rather than an ego trip.

Graffiti is a phenomenon that arouses strong feeling: anger, jealousy, admiration and joy.

None of the stereotypes surrounding graffiti are entirely true. Graffiti writers have no club or union. There are thousands of writers, and all of them have their own reasons for writing.

Nor do writers agree. What is most important: writing the most, or the best? What's the best? A New York mural, a modern Helsinki style, Sao Paolo tags?

And what does graffiti really mean?

Of course it is interesting to discuss graffiti, but it is quite hopeless when people don't know much about it. It isn't easy to understand graffiti, but that isn't necessary in order to appreciate it.

Tobias Barenthin Lindblad

Waste of time

In the last issue of UP we met Vifl who spent a few months in jail for writing graffiti. Now he has served his sentence. Since his release, he has moved to his own apartment and has gotten a job.
Was it hard getting work as a former convict?

"No, I don't think that many employers check up on that. Or if they do, they're more worried about theft."

How has your time in jail affected you?

"I don't know. It was mostly a waste of time. You just meet a lot of other shady people and hardly learn anything except doing the world's most brain-dead jobs. A chimpanzee could have done the work I did in there."

Even though Vifl only has negative things to say about his prison sentence, he hasn't stopped writing on trains.

"I've been taking it easier. On average, I've been doing maybe two panels a week since my release. But I hardly do walls any more. I doesn't seem worth the risk to get done for a wall."

One of the few positive things that Vifl's prison term brought with it was to enable him to develop his style by sketching a lot.

Vifl – 2003

"I didn't have much else to do there. And since my release, I sketch a lot more than before. Now I try to avoid doing the same thing twice. I don't want to go out any more and just do a sketch that's in my head. I want something that I have worked on, that I'm happy with."

Björn Almqvist

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Cover Photo by Fame crew. Member of Fame crew in a Stockholm subway yard.

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3. If a piece is a part of a wall or train with several pieces – send in all pieces.
4. Don't send the same photos to other magazines.
5. Enclose the following info: text on the piece, who made the piece, when it was done, where it was done and anything other interesting about the piece.
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Fame Crew painted inside the subwaystation Odenplan. Spring 2003

"We wanted something communal"

During the past year, colorful paintings bearing the word Fame have been seen adorning the Stockholm subway trains. Fame Crew have become a whole concept on the Stockholm train writing map with high quality and a large body of work.

One day in the middle of summer of 2003, Fame Crew are going to try to paint a subway car. Ape explains that he is unsure about the place they are going to. When they were there the previous day, it didn't look too good. They debate alternatives, but decide to stick to the original plan anyway.

Not much is said during the trip to the suburb. They exit the subway one stop before the last station of the line and walk the rest of the way. In a small bushy area, they shake their cans and run through how they are going to paint. Roxy and Plåster are to write Fame Crew and Ape is to do a character in the middle.

"We had a crew earlier, me, Roxy and a few guys from Umeå, but we stopped writing it when we moved to Stockholm," says Ape.

"We didn't want to keep the old name, and what's more, we were always painted with Skar, so we wanted something communal," says Roxy. Ape continues: "I also wanted a platform for making better pieces together. Before, we mainly wrote our own names, and the results weren't so good when we were pressed for time."

All members of the crew – Ape, Plåster, Roxy and Skar – come from the Umeå, a city in the northern part of Sweden (Norrland). Skar was the first to move to Stockholm, and now Ape and Roxy live there too. Plåster currently lives in Gothenburg.

Is Fame a Norrland crew?

"Yes, but there were no direct plans about this. It's just the way it happened," says Ape. "We could accept new members who weren't from Norrland, as long as we got on with them. The most important thing about Fame Crew is that we are close friends. Ape is one of my closest friends. I think we'd still see each other even if one of us quit writing," says Roxy.

They decided on the name Fame one evening while they were discussing different crew names. The inspiration came from the title theme to the American TV series *Fame* which was broadcast in Sweden in the 80s. "It has no other meaning than the meaning of the word 'fame'," explains Roxy. "There was quite a lot of beer in the picture when we came to the name," adds Ape. "But I think it's good."

The members of Fame belong to the second generation of Umeå writers. The earlier generation still wrote a bit in Umeå when Ape and Roxy started out in the mid-90s. But soon, nearly all that generation of writers moved to Stockholm, where they formed the first Norrland crew, Norrlands Guld (NG). Skar is also a member of NG.

"In Umeå, we mainly painted on walls and freight trains. There isn't much else to paint on. Passenger trains don't get parked there very often, and distances are vast if you are going somewhere," explains Ape. "Later, when I visited Skar in Stockholm, I painted a backjump on the subway. It was my first subway piece, and I thought it was great. After that I got the urge to do more."

It was in 2001 that Ape and Roxy moved to Stockholm, and Fame crew was formed about a year later.

"When we moved, basically everything was ready for us," says Roxy. "Skar already painted subways, and knew the score. He showed us most of the stuff."

However, Skar was only able to do one subway with Fame. Soon after that, he was badly beaten. He fell into a coma, and when he eventually regained consciousness, he had lost much movement in his limbs, and now, more than a year later, he has yet to fully recover. Nevertheless, he has resumed writing to a smaller degree.

Why did you move to Stockholm?

The Fame Crew – 2003

"To write more. Also, I'd been admitted to a school in Stockholm," says Ape. "I think I just wanted to write," says Roxy, "but I've just completed an education here in Stockholm."

They tell of sharing a basement apartment in a Stockholm suburb at first. A while ago Roxy got his own apartment. Now Ape lives there too, while the basement is being renovated.

After having prepared their cans and discussed how to share the painting job, they make their way to the end of the line where the painting is to take place.

A train arrives at the station, right on time. They decide to paint it. After giving the station the once-over, they hop down onto the tracks at the back. They cross to the other side of the train and sneak along it. Once they have reached their positions, Roxy starts sketching a Fame piece. Ape starts on his character. A few seconds later, Plåster has begun a Crew piece. They work quickly but with concentration, and regularly check their flanks.

Why do you write on subways, specifically?

"We'd mainly done walls in Umeå, and I wanted to do more trains. Doing the subway is also a fuller experience. A painting fits so well on it. There's something romantic about a subway painting, and it's an incredibly comical idea to write your name in colors and glitz. Sometimes we ride on cars we've painted, just to see people's reactions. It's such an enormous feeling having a painting travel around town, and if people don't react I feel like banging on the window-pane to make them notice that there actually is a painting right in front of them," says Ape.

"We've always lived along the subway tracks since we moved here," says Roxy. "Before, when we lived near an end of a line, we used to go there, do a backjump, take a picture and then go home and watch a video. The subway has always been close."

What distinguishes many Fame paintings is that they are so well-made, often with many colors and sometimes even characters, which in later years have been a rare feature on the Stockholm subway.

"We often write 'Fame Crew', for example, but it's still our own individual work. One does 'Fame' and the other does 'Crew'. But we try to combine fill-ins, background, etc. It becomes a unity," explains Roxy.

But your styles resemble each other. Most of the time you can't see that each has done his own painting.

"It gets that way during some periods when we write a lot together. We're influenced by each other," says Ape. "We try to make the sketches work together, but

The Fame Crew – 2003

they're still different. I think if you look carefully, you can see that the styles differ. That's how it should be: a bit different," says Roxy.

Is your Fame style different from when you write your own names?

"My idea was that Fame should be a bit ritzier, more attractive. Like a fancy box of chocolates, or a really expensive watch," says Ape. "My style when I write Roxy is different from Fame, but they are influenced by each other," adds Roxy.

They explain that arguments sometimes arise about who should sketch up the paintings they have planned to do together, which usually end in them doing their own paintings.

"Fame should be like a fancy box of chocolates, or a really expensive watch."

"But I'm always the one who does the characters. That can get a bit hard sometimes. If Plåster is in town, say, and we do a piece together, I usually do the character and Roxy and Plåster do the text. I don't always develop my characters, and sometimes I just throw one up I did before," says Ape.

Despite this, they don't see their communal paintings as a problem. They say they probably wouldn't do more communal paintings if they had more time, but develop them more.

"Maybe make them bigger, more colorful, or make more pieces at the same occasion," says Roxy.

Some of your Fame pieces tend to look a bit samey...

"Yeah, but I always think something doesn't quite work, that could be done better. And then I want to do it over until the painting looks good. My style is being developed during that time. Also, sometimes, when we write very intensely, there's no time for sketching. Then you use a sketch in your head, that you might already have done once," says Ape.

"It's mainly on quick paintings, like backjumps, that not much happens. When we have time, we try to do something extra," says Roxy.

After writing for a few minutes, Roxy starts doing outlines. Ape has already done the outlines of his character. Plåster looks to one side, then cries out "Watch out!" in a low voice and runs past the two others. Ape and Roxy go after him, followed by the train driver. He is a tall guy in his thirties with blond hair. He is running at full tilt and seems bent on catching them. Plåster and Ape jump over the fence and Roxy follows soon after. The driver stops. He keeps his eyes on them while he picks up the spray cans they left behind. He walks alongside the train, looks at the unfinished painting and sighs.

Do you often work with other writers, or do you prefer to work with the others in your crew?

"It works really well when we write on our own," says Roxy, and they explain that one look is enough to understand what the other person means, and that it is easier to write on your own and not have to watch anyone else's back, just your own.

"Occasionally, we write with others. Before, when there were plainclothes guards, we preferred to write alone. It seemed stupid to form a big gathering. Now it doesn't matter as much, says Ape."

Do you think that subway painting has changed since plainclothes guards were phased out?

"No," says Roxy. "We write in the same way as before. Though now, the drivers care more. They get involved, and shout. But on the whole, not much has changed for us. The time you have to write is just as short. So it's just as much effort anyway."

"It seems to me that there is more writing now," adds Ape. I see more pieces on the subway and we've also bumped into other writers at the last stations. Once we met four guys in an indoor end of a line. There

Fame Crew – 2003

were already four of us, so eight people were in there painting. The others left in the middle of painting and the driver saw them, so he came running while we stood there writing. But we got away, it was all right."

Does some of the creative thrill go away if it gets easier to write on the subway?

"Of course there's something in the very act of painting the subway," replies Ape, "but I think that in that case you just try to make better pieces. It can become a stylistic development. In some ways it's already happened. There are a lot of good paintings on subways."

"But there's a lot of shit too," says Roxy.

"Ape continues: "Competition counts. It's good that there are others who write, and do it well. The competition ensures development."

"We used to do a backjump, take a picture and then go home and watch a video."

They say they prefer to paint in color on the subway, and that a portion of the painted car should be visible. Roxy explains: "I think a fat color panel can be better than a wholecar. It's cool to do a wholecar, but it's not much fun to stand filling a car with chrome. I like more color. We almost always do color pieces."

But is it worth painting a subway car when it is almost immediately cleaned?

"The thing is to get it moving around town. That feels great, it can make up for an otherwise lousy day. Then there's the painting itself, painting the subway," says Ape.

Roxy carries on: "Since they clean them as quickly as they do, you have to paint a lot, so that they're visible. Our writing is periodic, but we probably paint three times a week on average."

Fifteen minutes later, they have reached another subway station. They discuss what happened and Plåster says he heard a soft hissing sound before the driver appeared, probably from the driver's cab, when the door opened. The driver had emerged right next to them. Ape dries the blood off his hands, which he cut when he was jumping over the fence. "That's the worst kind of driver," he observes.

They talk for a while and curse the unfinished painting and lost cans. Then Roxy wants to go swimming.

Do punishments deter you?

"You can't go around worrying about what might happen if you get caught," says Roxy. "Then you'd never get anything done. At the same time, it's always in the back of my head, and if it doesn't feel right, I don't paint."

Ape says he is aware of what would happen if he got caught.

"I once got caught writing on the subway. It's not that expensive to clean, so the fines aren't sky-high. If there was a risk of going to jail, I'd probably think again."

"I got caught for a backjump I was doing on the subway with some writers from out of town, " says Roxy. "But apart from that, we haven't had much trouble. On a few occasions, we saw the plainclothes guards before we started to write, so we went somewhere else."

Are you fixated on trains abroad as well?

"No, not really," says Roxy. "I haven't travelled much. And it's the Stockholm subway I want to paint. It's better to write a lot here, where it's visible, than to do it in some other city, where your painting will just disappear among the others."

"I never have any money, so I never get away. I don't have a great urge to write in other cities either. I was in Denmark a while ago, and I didn't

Fame Crew – 2003

dare write there. I don't know how it works, and I've heard about the harsh punishments they mete out," says Ape.

Are you interested in any other kind of art than graffiti?

"I've studied graphics, and used to paint canvases earlier. I haven't done any this past year. But I've just entered a good art school that I will be attending for the next few years," says Ape.

"I'm interested in most art, but it's nothing I do myself. I've painted a few canvases, and I guess that's it," says Roxy.

Later that evening, they hear that the unfinished painting is still in circulation. They decide to find the car and try to finish the piece. Half an hour later, the train passes Blackeberg station, heading for the city center. It has been in circulation for over four hours, which is highly unusual in Stockholm, where painted subways are usually taken out of traffic within an hour.

Ape, Plåster and Roxy are waiting at the subway station at Brommaplan. When the train arrives, they pull the emergency brake before jumping down on the tracks, running up to the piece, and resuming their work. After a minute or so, when they are almost done, someone jumps onto the tracks next to them. It is the same driver that pursued them earlier. To give the others more time to write, Ape runs up to him and tackles him. They collide and fall. Ape gets up and jumps over the fence. The driver instead catches Plåster, and Ape jumps back onto the tracks and helps him get away. Plåster jumps over the fence, but this time the driver snags Ape. Plåster jumps back and helps Ape. Finally they both get over the fence where Roxy is waiting, and leave. "That was one of the craziest things I ever saw. We never get into fights otherwise," Ape observes.

Torkel Sjöstrand

Ape – 2003

Ape..

..Roxy – 2003

Ape – 2003

Roxy – 2003

Fame Crew painted on an old flat car in 2003

Plas, Roxy, Fame – 2003

The Fame Crew – 2003

Fame Crew – 2003

Fame, the first piece. Made in the summer of 2002

Fame Crew – 2003

Fame Crew – Gothenburg, 2003

Bingo, Punk

"It's gotta be hard"

Two-man crew KCE has only been around for a few months, but its members, Punk and Bingo, have stuck together in various combinations since they started writing graffiti together five years ago. Though Punk is one of Gothenburg's most notorious street bombers, Bingo had mainly done legal walls up until six months ago.

"The reason I didn't write illegally much for some years was that I got so gripped by the idea that I could actually get locked up for graffiti. Punk and I were detained for 24 hours. It was grim. Even if it wasn't really that long, it felt like an eternity. For Punk, it was the other way round. He started writing more instead," says Bingo.

"It was really hard. That feeling stayed with me for a week or so. Then I became more driven to write. I wanted to get my revenge," says Punk.

After a few years, Bingo grew tired of constantly writing on the legal walls of Gothenburg.

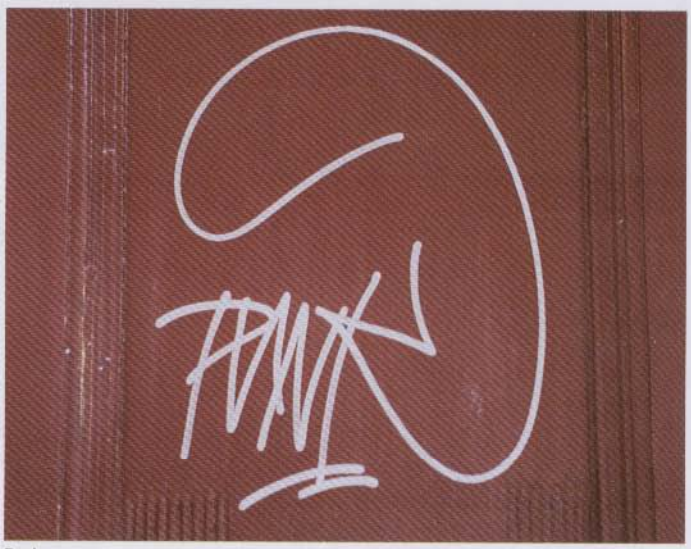
"It can be fun to write legally, but I always feel I could have done the piece somewhere else. I want to be able to see my pieces without exerting myself, in places I pass every day. Lately I've been writing a lot along the way that I walk to school. I know I'll be walking that way."

Bingo attends an art school. He hopes to use what he has learnt within graffiti in a future career.

"I haven't really any plans. But if I'm going to enjoy my work, it has to be within the field of aesthetics."

Punk has also attended art school, but he lost interest.

"I have always drawn, and earlier I thought I would be a comic book artist. But now I've come to realize that this is what I do. I put all my creative energy into graffiti. Anything else is a hobby. When I first came to this realization, I thought it was a bit sad because there are so many other things I'm sacrificing. And when you're doing something that no one but the initiated accept, you don't get anywhere in society. But now I've chosen this, so I feel very strongly that graffiti should be taken seriously by its practitioners. Our choice is no worse than anybody else's. I want to feel that for myself too. Just because I'm not accepted by others in society that doesn't mean that what I do is less worthy. That's why I don't like compromise, trying to adapt graffiti to make it more acceptable," says Punk.



Punk

Punk usually writes political slogans next to his pieces, often relating to feminism. It can be anything from a female symbol to "eat my pussy". Punk is an anarchist and anti-sexist, and thinks lad culture in graffiti is a major problem.

Kce

Punk, Bingo

"I get tired of both myself and graffiti culture, because it is so macho. If graffiti is my life project, I'm just another man with a project, just like all other men with projects in the world. I realize I'm not exactly striking a blow for feminism when I draw a female symbol by a piece. I'm still just a guy going out to do a guy thing. But I thought it was pretty good fun when I noticed how it riled so many other guys up. Once I wrote "Never trust men" next to a piece. I got dissed quite a lot after that. I noticed people had been provoked. It's sad that graffiti culture is so exclusively male," says Punk.

Why do you, as a man, feel so strongly about that?

"I like graffiti so much and want all of us to take part in it. We live in a male society where guys and men reward and encourage each other at the cost of women. Girls who resist the pressure and write graffiti despite all that don't get the same attention as guys. They're often treated like amusing mascots. That's not cool."

Punk refers to himself as a political activist. He says he is opposed to all forms of power and oppression. At the same time, he wears Nikes, one of the clothing companies that has received the most criticism for exploiting Third World labor, from the shoes on his feet to the band around his head.

"It's pretty hard to dress like a rapper if you can't buy anything American. And I don't want to look like some fucking hippie. So I made that decision. It seems worthless to conduct your own personal boycott. You'd have to start sewing your own clothes. I'm against capitalism, not just Nike. Nike are evil, but it would be stupid to think that things would get better if Nike just disappeared. The system that makes exploitation possible would still be there. Everything is made in some low-tax zone in Asia anyway."

In contrast to Punk, Bingo isn't particularly interested in politics. He doesn't want to label himself, even though he shares several of Punk's values. However, he does see illegal graffiti partly as a political gesture.

"It's political whether you realize it or not. I don't do it as a political thing, but I realize that the act is political. I am setting myself up against society and the law. You do that because you're not satisfied with it," says Bingo.

What aren't you satisfied with?

"I want to write. And they won't let me. But in reality, I don't want it to be legal to write everywhere. If graffiti is to develop, buffing must be there. In cities where it's never cleaned away, you see the same tags year after year. And if you only see the old stuff that just lies there, you're always getting inspiration from the same direction," says Bingo.

"That's why Sweden has such developed styles, because our buffing is so hysterical. I think that's good. I'm pretty happy with the way things are today. If it was legal, I wouldn't paint graffiti. There'd be no reason," adds Punk.

"I'm pretty happy with the way things are today. If it was legal, I wouldn't paint graffiti. There'd be no reason."

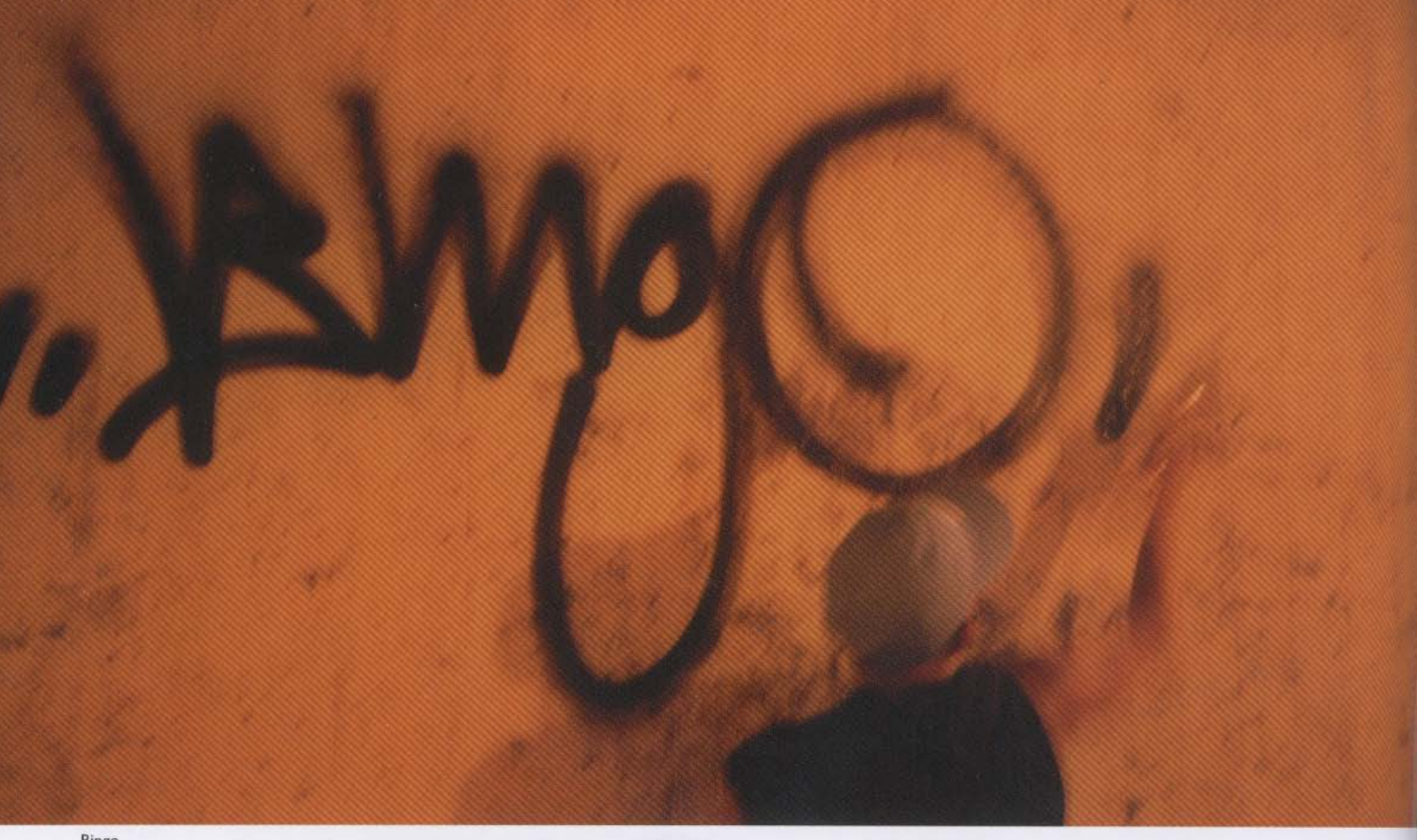
"Well, it would still be just as fun to do a tag on a piece of paper," Bingo objects.

"Purely aesthetically, yeah. But most people I know would find something else to do if it was legal. I think the fact that it is illegal makes it more fun. Every time you do a tag, you've accomplished something in spite of all the resistance. It's a boost for your self-confidence. From the aesthetic point of view, it looks better because of the speed. Pressure brings out the best in people if they know what they're doing," says Punk.

Though Punk and Bingo sometimes seem different, they go well together both within and outside of the field of graffiti.

"The name KCE doesn't mean anything in particular. It stands for me and Bingo's friendship. We started writing about a year after getting to know each other. Most of our common past is associated with graffiti. Sometimes it felt a bit lonely when I was the only one bombing. But Bingo never lost interest. He always thought it was still as much fun and was still as involved. And when we write together, it moves smoothly because we have routines. I know his limitations and how he thinks," says Punk.

"We started writing together and are best friends. Punk drives me to write. Of course, I mainly want to satisfy myself, but on the other hand I also want to impress Punk with what I can achieve. Regardless of what happened in graffiti, we've always been buddies. Me and Punk are pretty honest with each other, and if one of us doesn't like what the other one's done, we say so. We're not afraid of dissing each other. We're more



Bingo

open and have learnt to accept criticism from each other," says Bingo.

Their influences are varied. Bingo mentions German and Czech graffiti. Punk also likes German styles, especially those from Berlin, but above all he likes the American bombing scene.

"I'm a crazed US fan and get most of my inspiration from there. It's so exciting in the US. When it comes to color walls, they're often stylistically far behind. From my European perspective, I think Europe and Sweden are far ahead there. But no country on earth can measure up to their throwups and tags. And the best thing I know is just to sit checking out tags. The States have an insanely driven bombing scene. It's so developed because people throw themselves into it 100 per cent. It's like the train scene here in Sweden, where some people completely dedicate themselves to writing on trains. And when you get into something, that's when you reach a higher level," says Punk.

"It's not gonna be coy and playful with some fucking flower or cute animals. It's gotta be hard."

What is it you like about tags and bombed facades?

"That's what got me interested from the start. When I was a kid and saw tags. There was something mysterious about them. I didn't get what it was, but it was so fucking cool. I sat trying to do it myself and couldn't understand why it was so hard. When I tried to do a letter, it didn't look at all as cool as the one I was trying to copy. Now I think I can get my tags to look pretty much the way I'd planned, but it's taken years."

Even though they get inspiration from different quarters, what they have in common is that they like their graffiti harsh and bare.

"Even if we've got different styles, we have the same attitude. The fundamental thing when it comes to KCE is that we're not gonna have any fucking cutesy crap. It's not gonna be coy and playful with some fucking flower or cute animals. It's gotta be hard," says Punk resolutely.

"It's gotta look tense without being stale. We have some unwritten rules about what KCE doesn't stand for. For instance, Punk would never print up some goddamn street art posters and write KCE underneath. The most important thing is that you agree what the crew doesn't stand for," adds Bingo.

Why do you dislike so-called street art so much?

"Street art isn't necessarily bad. But it annoys me that it's considered better," Punk replies.

"Some people think there's more thought behind it," says Bingo, and continues: "A lot of people think that a chrome piece can't be as good as a color piece. That's so stupid. Because it's when you've done a one-color piece that one can really see what you've done. In a color piece you can always hide the letters with the colors. But it's the letters that it all builds on. If they look good, it looks good. We hate it when people do illegible color pieces along the tracks. If you haven't got time to read what it says while you're riding past, the piece is meaningless. It's just idiotic."

"To me, graffiti is about the openings on an E or the curves on an S. That signals so much. You can look at the letters like characters that express different feelings. When you see street pieces from Berlin, they express loads of feeling. Or Arsle and Ligisd from Stockholm. There are no ornaments. It's right on. Paintings that say: 'Here I am, this piece is *dope*!' That we want it to look hard hasn't got anything to do with new school or old school. I just think that the letters should have a certain attitude or expression," says Punk.

They share a fascination for things with a hard attitude even in other fields.

"It's about everything. How you dress, what music you listen to. I like to feel a bit cool. If you like to draw and have a complex about being a bit of a nerd, and also look up to tough American rap artists, graffiti is the perfect way to get a bit cooler. To feel cool is something I think all young people strive towards, even though most writers might not admit it. But I'm not ashamed of that. And since graffiti is one of the coolest things I know, I feel cool when I'm doing it," Punk explains.

Björn Almqvist

Aero, Amx, Punk

Punk, Bingo, Kce

Bingo

Punk

Punk

Kce

Punk, Kce

Days of love nights of war

Punk

Bingo

Kce

Saek

Bingo

Kce – Berlin

Saek

Kce

If I die 2day I'm happy how my life turned out

Punk

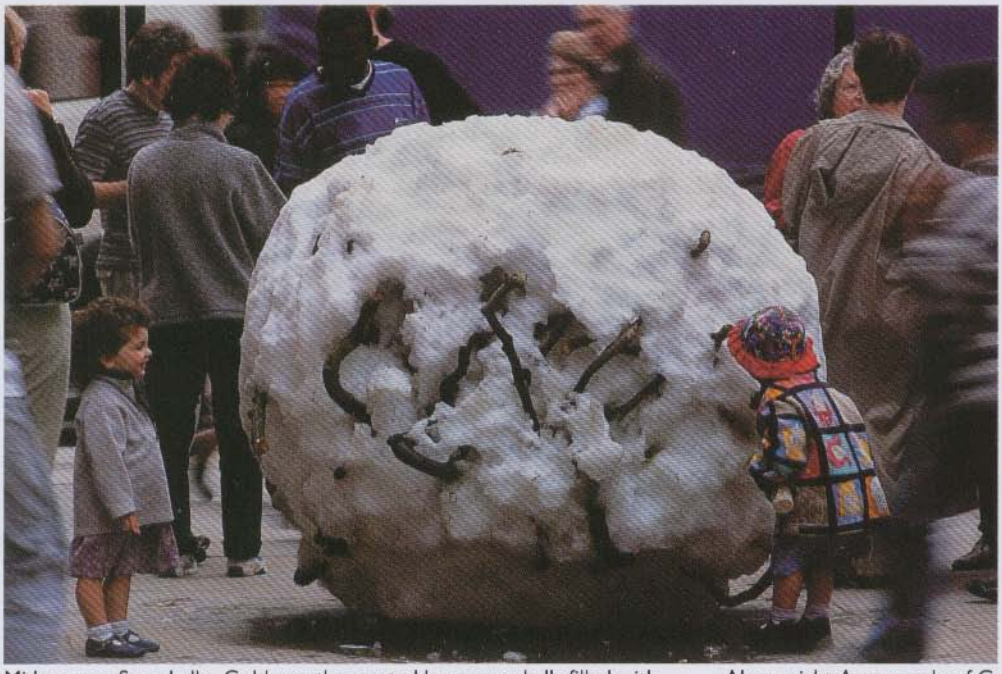
Punk, Punk

Bingo

Bingoone, Kce

Punk

Kce!, Punk



Midsummer Snowballs. Goldsworthy created large snowballs filled with natural materials, refrigerated them until summer, and then placed them in central London and photographed the melting process.

Above right: An example of Goldworthy's process. Probably, that is his siloette on the ground, he likely laid there as it started to rain, then jumped up and took the photo as the man walked by.

Rivers and tides, spots and cuts

Scottish artist Andy Goldsworthy is a well-known man in the art world, and is one of the rare artists whose work speaks with an energy in common with graffiti.

His ephemeral (i.e. not permanent) pieces are made with entirely natural materials and are visible to the public only by means of Goldsworthy's documentary photography. He takes these photographs and packages them in the form of quite attractive and popular coffee table books. In Goldsworthy's hands – and his works are all hand made – leaves turn into wrapping paper, rocks into balancing acts, sticks into scaffolds, and so on. So why the meaningful connection with graffiti? The answer lies in their mutual embrace of ephemerality, location, and the harmony of materials and the work's surroundings.

The classic question put to Andy Goldsworthy is if it pains him to see his work disappear. For writers, the question will be just as familiar. In each case, the artist working in ephemeral chooses to embrace it, and to recognize the freedom and multiplicity that it affords: after all, there are many types of ephemerality, and only one of permanance.

Goldsworthy's work may only last for three seconds after completion, just long enough to photograph it, or in the case of the artful stone walls he builds, they may last hundreds of years, though in constant flux. An oil painting on canvas, if it has a story, will likely only have one of its succession of owners. A painted subway car in the present day is likely never to run in public, but to be removed by the cleaners in the pre dawn hours. On the other hand, a lucky artwork in the city streets could last a decade, an eternity in street art years. Like the stone wall that Goldsworthy builds to incorporate the future of moss and new growth, the urban graffiti piece in a back alley way will fade, suffer flea bites at the hands of young markers, or suffer a partial buffing from a cleanup's brush.

To create work out of doors is to create an instant rapport and context with the larger world. Such instant and valid context is a difficult proposition in the manufactured space of a museum, without entering into the navel-gazing world of art-in-a-museum-about-being-art-in-a-museum. Goldsworthy's work begins and ends as natural materials, with a short sojourn in between of shape held by human hand and eye. To the graffiti artist, the city should feel just as alive and natural; an expression of humanity's need for survival and social centering. Human dwellings and terrain as we shape it have evolved over thousands of years and have natural tendencies the world over: streets, roofs, trains, stores, and homes.

Beginning with an understanding that these forms are as natural to humans as trees are to nature, the graffiti writer works towards the same harmony with his or her own perception of "nature" as Goldsworthy does.

With ephemera necessarily comes documentation, and out of that arises a key difference between Andy Goldsworthy and almost all street artists. Graffiti is all about audience and getting seen, even, getting fame. It is simply not a medium for those shy about their creations. Goldsworthy, on the other hand, cultivates an aesthetic where nobody else matters but himself and nature. Clearly, we are all to like his work – and honestly, what's not to like? Goldsworthy is one of the few artists ever to enjoy near universal appreciation and respect for what he does from both critics and the general public. Yet Goldsworthy's artistic world invites nobody else in, we see only his photographs and stories, without any particular sense that what he is saying could in any way involve us as important viewers. Graffiti, in contrast, holds us all as its only hope, for if we don't like it, wonder who did it and how they got away with it, then the work is, for better or worse, worthless. In the end, Goldsworthy in all his effortlessly Romantic earth-connected grace, reaches no hand out to us, but instead sets a model for how we in turn could reach out our own hands to nature. Graffiti has few trees to speak to: its validation, by nature, comes from people.

Caleb Neelon / SONIK

Take a look at Andy Goldsworthy's many beautiful books from Abrams Press, see the recent movie entitled Andy Goldsworthy: *Rivers and Tides* or search the web, where there will be plenty to look at.

Brooklyn, 2001

"You don't have to pay for a good time"

Despite increasingly firm sanctions against graffiti, many New York facades are still covered with names. Severe punishments and an efficient buffing campaign mainly seem to have led to more throwups and tags. One of those New York writers who refuse to give up is Cycle from TC5 crew. For Cycle it is important to get the big picture as a graffiti writer and to have his name appear all around town. UP met him in Brooklyn on a cold night in the spring of 2003.

"I love being a graffiti writer here in New York, because this is where it really began, grew and flowered. The history here is just immense. It's beautiful. I feel honored to be a link in history and to be in a crew like TC5. That the guys who have been painting since 1969 have taken a look at what I have done and asked me to be down."

But conditions have changed since Cycle seriously started writing 13 years ago.

"The people in power have been hard on me. I had to go to court this morning. They try very hard to wipe graffiti out, which is a real shame. Because this city used to be a lot of fun. It used to be a cultural center. You had the opportunity to go out and do things. But now they are trying to make everything nice and polite. That's not what New York used to be. It used to be energetic and wild. And look at the stuff that came out of that: the dancing, the music. I'm not just talking hip-hop. I'm also talking about club-stuff and jazz."

Do you think they've succeeded in making the city nice and polite?

"Half and half. They have won some, but there are a lot of people who aren't giving up. Unfortunately, the people that aren't giving up are becoming fewer and fewer. I'm hoping for a new generation with people who say 'fuck that', and have the energy to go out and do it."

Do you see yourself as one of the people that don't give up?

"I can't give up. I love it too much. I've gotta keep going. It's too late for me, man, I'm a lifer."

What is it that you love so much?

"It just feels right. I feel free. I don't feel like I'm commiting a crime when I write. To me, I'm just coloring the world like it's one big coloring-book. I'm not here to hurt people or ruin anybody's life."

As Cycle writes, graffiti takes him to odd places. Exciting places where you shouldn't really be.

"I'm learning about my environment, about what goes on in the city. I have been in parts of the world that most people don't get to see, like the tunnels. Everybody rides the subway, but few have seen the subway tunnels. They built this environment and I'm here to explore it. I'm not gonna limit myself. Writers see opportunities to take a space that is normally disregarded and make something out of it. That's what's so great about graffiti. It's breaking down the barriers of what's acceptable and established, and finds alternative means for getting our voice out there."

Why do you think it is important to break down barriers?

Cycle – Queens, 2000

"Because money controls everything in this society. If you look at the big buildings in a society, they tell you what is important in that society. In medieval times, what was important? Castles for the kings. In the Renaissance it was churches. What's the biggest building in our community these days? Economic institutions. The World Trade Center. Wall Street, those are our biggest buildings. And that's what's important to our society. Money and economics. Graffiti sidetracks all that. We don't need to play their money game. We can do our thing regardless. Here is graffiti and you don't have to pay for a good time. This is how we feel like expressing ourselves, and godammit, here it is."

While many writers concentrate on one field within graffiti, Cycle prefers to do everything. He sees no reason to limit himself when it comes to circulating his name. He says he has started to take it easier and is working more with computer design and fine art, but Cycle is still one of the names you encounter all over town.

"Like Min said in Style Wars: to call yourself a king you've gotta do it all – insides, outsides, top-to-bottoms, throwups, pieces. You've gotta come with styles, you've gotta come with fill-ins, throw-ups, drippy tags. You've gotta come with everything. A lot of kids are just street bombers now. They just come out and do throwups in the street for one or two years and they think they're doing something, but they're not."

Cycle, throwup on Lafayette street, Manhattan, New York

Why do so many limit themselves to street bombing nowadays?

"They are not willing to take the risk. A lot of kids have become lazy. They just bomb Downtown Manhattan. But if you're gonna be a street bomber you've gotta do the entire city. I want to see you in Queens, I want to see you in Brooklyn. Get out there and do it! The writers that excite me are the people that do everything. That's what it's always been about for me. Having a complete picture. You've gotta play it like a chessboard where your tags are like pawns and your throw-ups are your queen. The pieces are the king. You've gotta play it like that, and be willing to lose a little to gain respect."

How has zero tolerance affected the New York graffiti scene?

"It makes people's graffiti careers shorter. It just hurts me that they are killing a home-grown culture. The people in the courts system, the people who have economic power, don't understand that they are killing an indigenous culture in New York. It's just like if they were trying to stop Jazz or something. All they are worried about is the money aspect of it. They don't see the greater benefits of this culture. Because of my involvement in this art form, I'm getting to communicate with people globally. Our government is going to war over here, are pissed at people over there. Fuck that. I got the chance to go anywhere in the world and meet people and be friends with those people because of what I do. That's an amazing thing. But my government doesn't care about the greater good and the unifying factor of this art form."

Björn Almqvist

Cycle, Tc5 – Brooklyn

Harlem

NEW YORK

Manhattan

Irak, Nyc – Manhattan

Fanta – Manhattan

Vise – Brooklyn

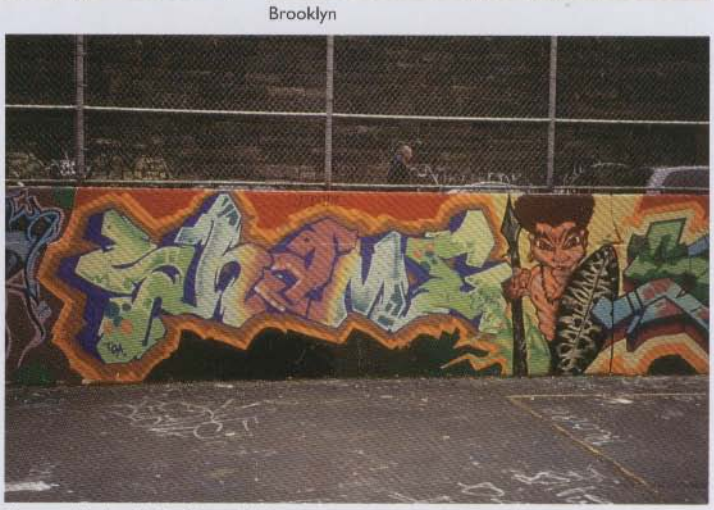
Manhattan

Miss 17 – Manhattan

Brooklyn

Iz the Wiz – Brooklyn

Setup – Brooklyn



Shame – Harlem Hall of Fame, 2002

Manhattan

Manhattan

Manhattan

Wufcdc –2003

QUE & UZI

Wufc, Ner – 2003

Sdk, Ner – 2003

Que, Uzi – 2003

Uzi, Egs, Que – 2003

Wufcsdk – 2003

Que, Uzi – 2003

Que, Uzi – 2003

Wufc painted 2003 on the only flat car running in Stockholm. Its a prototype that is being tried out by SL for future purposes.

Wufc painted at daytime 2003

20

Que, Uzi – 2003

Uzi, Que – 20

Que, Uze – 2003

Usi – 20

Uzi, Que – 2003

Nick – 20

Wufc, Wufc – 2003

Que – 20

Que, Uzi – 2003

Wufc – 20

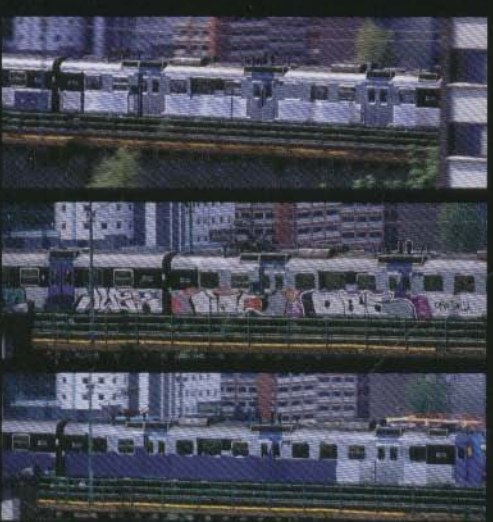
20

Spring 2003

STOCKHOLM COMMUTER

One, Bug, Reil, Soye – 2003

One, Gets – 2003



Stockholm summer 2003, an unfinished wholecar gets crossed by pieces, which in the end gets painted over with blue by SL

Vision – 2003

Gets – 2003

Balls, Cake, Matador – 200

Flat, Rob, Balls, Nirr – 200

Marta, Elle, Close, F.up, ? – 200

Agent Orange – 200

Gets, Vsn, Blak, Risla – 200

Hook, Sadone, Affe, Ins – 2000

7upp, Dirte, Ape, Fame, Unik – 200

Dios, Show, Bubba, Sad – 200

Rrroxy, Dirte, Unik– 200

Raxe, Bor, Balls, Ufo – 2003

Pms, Hka, Tds, Lylc – 2003

Ians, Cake, Hank – 2003

Dirte, Reil, Unde – 2003

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Vsn,..

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Fher, Pms – 2003

STOCKHOLM SUBWAY

Tier – 2003

Fame, Ib, Y2k – 2003

Fher – 2003

Que, Uzi, Tier – 2003

Fy – 2003

Hnr, Wufc – 2003

Ins – 2003

Ib, Soye – 2003

Bug, Ovn, Roxy – 20

Dt, Fy – 2003

Pms – 20

Ner, Fy, Fy – 2003

_Td,Vim – 200

Free, Fher – 2003

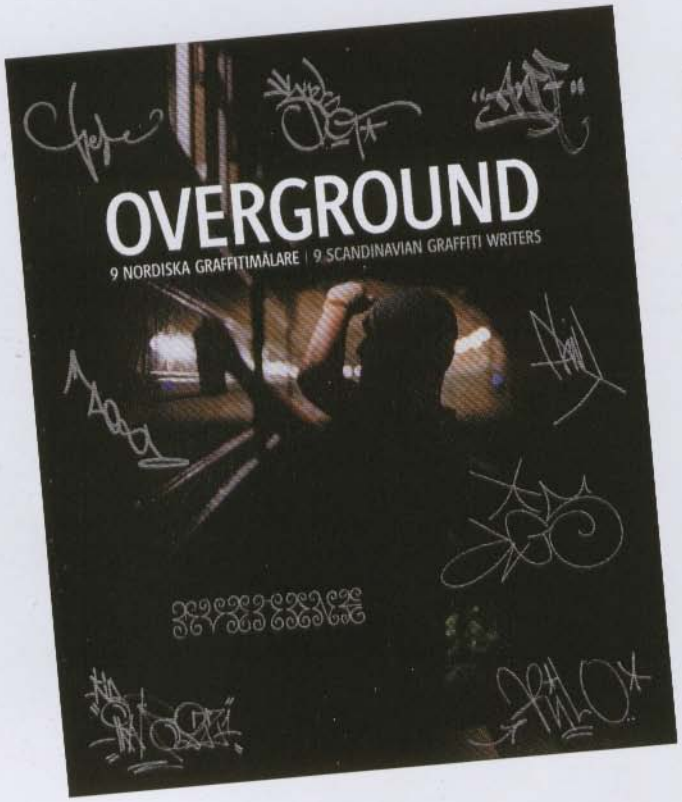
Tier – 20

Ner, Fy – 2003

Hook – 20

Wufc, Ner,View – 2003

Leon – 200



In the book Overground, nine of the most interesting Scandinavian graffiti writers open their photo albums and their hearts. Each has a personal pictorial language and his own thoughts on graffiti and life. We have compiled their pictures and thoughts with the pictures and thoughts of seven journalists and photographers.

Graffiti writers have an ambiguous relationship to appearing in public. While they are generous with their art, they are very secretive about their persons. We see a tag here, a piece there. The beholder may find it hard to understand the meaning of graffiti. Here is a unique chance to understand Scandinavian graffiiti writers – at least nine of them.

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English and Swedish text
Hard cover: ISBN 91-973981-1-X
Soft cover: ISBN 91-973981-2-8
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Malcolm Jacobson and Tobias Barenthin Lindblad

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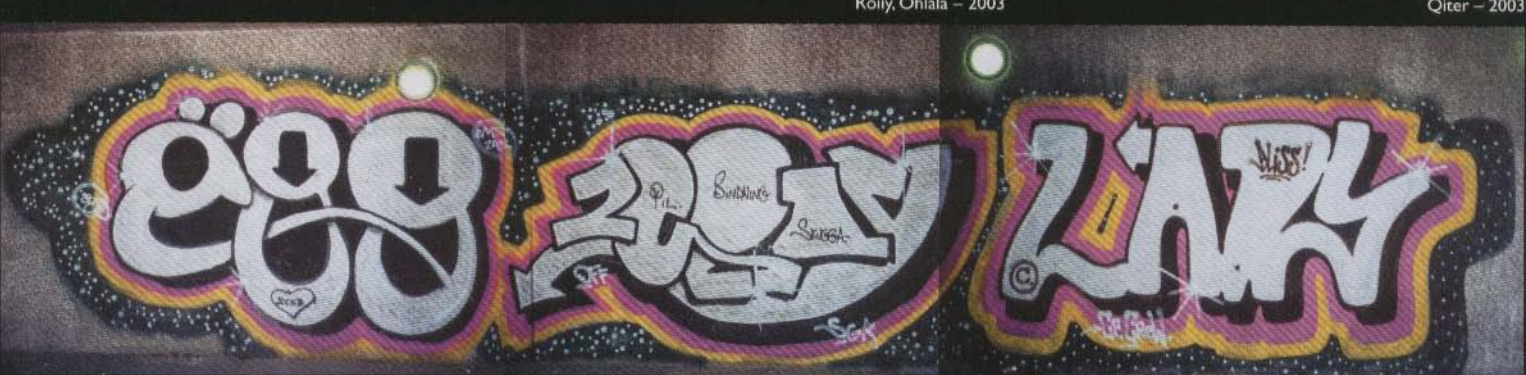

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Nuek, Sarek on a Regina train 200

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Sarek, Nils on a longdistanstrain in Borlänge 2003

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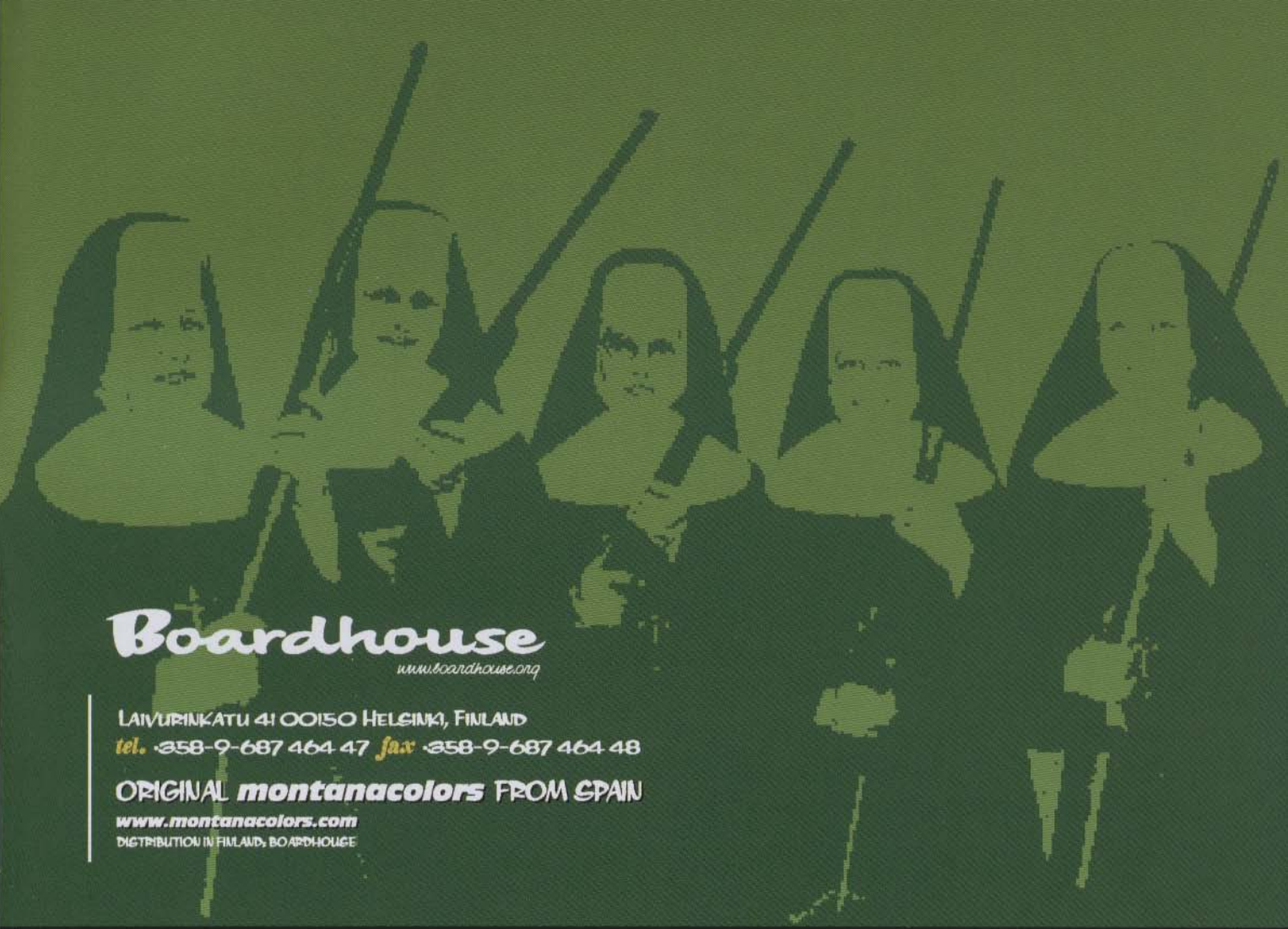

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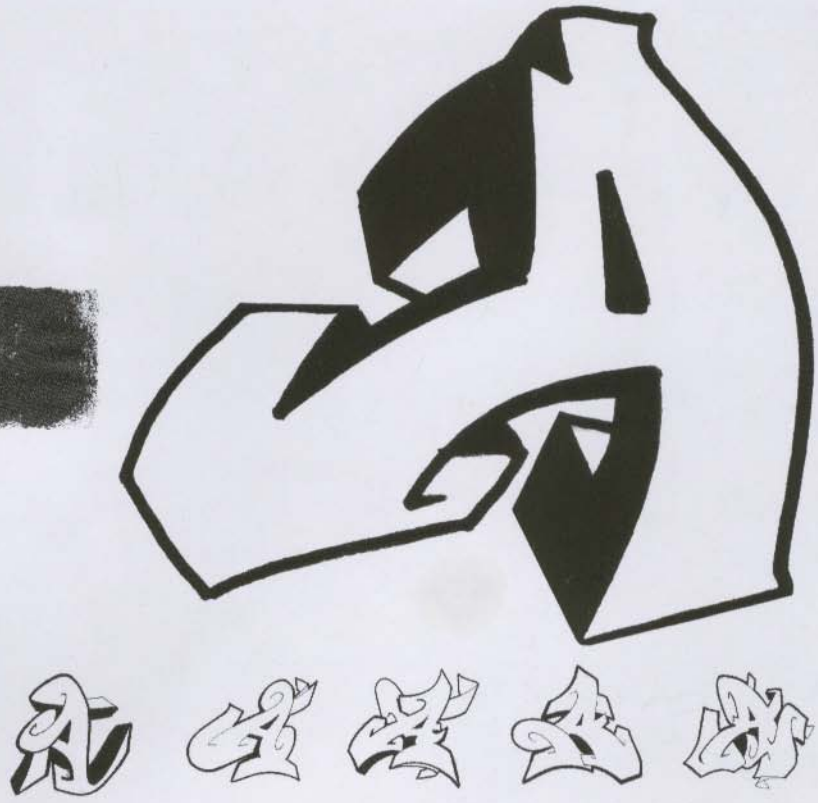

Milk, Berlin 2003

Room to deviate

Like friendship, a book is greater than the sum of its parts. Text and images collaborate to give the reader information, inspiration and new thoughts. It isn't easy to produce a book, and it shouldn't be.

My first thought on perusing *Writing – Urban Calligraphy and Beyond* is: don't let it end! *Writing* discusses graffiti culture from the form and expression of lettering: how it is influenced by other forms, and its effect on architecture, advertising, graphic design and other modern art forms.

The book is fairly Berlin-oriented, both in its selection of writers and its style. Two chapters as an introduction concerning the shapes of lettering in tags, throw-ups and pieces. And what lettering! The cream of the Berlin scene has contributed, including entire alphabets by Phos 4, Dez 78 and Tyrone. We knew that Berliners take their lettering seriously.

One of the more fascinating ideas to be presented is the comparison between graffiti and jazz, which brings me to the thought that graffiti really is a universal language. In the introduction, the authors write: "...the development of writing can be compared to the history of jazz... Like in jazz, there are affectations in writing. There are also many rules that should be obeyed, and therefore, room to deviate from them and improvise. In both disciplines it is absolutely imperative for one to master technique before one can develop a personal style."

Most authors would have stopped there, but this is only the beginning. The reciprocal influence between the city and graffiti is further discussed, as are architecture (Zedz's design of letter houses!), sculpture (Point's big letter sculptures on streets and squares in Prague) and graphic design, with everything from logotypes to entire pages from sketch books (represented by Killa and Finsta from Sweden, for instance). Last but not least is a taste of what the authors call Urban Activism: Swoon's cut-out dolls, Zev's advertising kidnappings, Dutch Pipslab's pocket torch tags, and Hektor, the world's first graffiti robot.

For once, a graffiti book has really succeeded in inspiring me, informing me and giving me a few interesting insights.

Tobias Barenthin Lindblad

Writing – Urban Calligraphy and Beyond
Markus Mai and Arthur Remke,
Die Gestalten Verlag, Berlin, 2003

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